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RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1810
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5284
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8884
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000120

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM BM
SUBJECT: BURMA: NLD SOUL SEARCHING ON SANCTIONS, BAN VISIT

REF: A. RANGOON 111
1B. RANGOON 96

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Classified By: P/E Chief Jennifer Harhigh for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

11. (C) The National League for Democracy (NLD) has issued a correction to its February 17 "Special Statement" to clarify that the NLD has not changed its stance on sanctions. The original statement contained language interpreted by some media as criticizing economic sanctions. Party leaders now claim they meant to attribute the criticism to the SPDC regime, not to the NLD itself. Separately, NLD elders told us they would welcome a visit by UN SYG Ban Ki-Moon but will not invite him. NLD Central Executive Committee (CEC) member Win Tin has confirmed that he refused a one-on-one meeting with UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Tomas Ojea Quintana because he was given little advance notice and no opportunity to consult with other NLD members prior to a meeting. The party appears to be struggling to define its approach to issues, with surprising disagreement at the top.
End summary.

Correction on Sanctions Language

12. (C) NLD Central Executive Committee member Win Tin and party spokesman Nyan Win told us February 23 that the party has not changed its stance on sanctions. They stressed that the NLD's February 17 "Special Statement" was misinterpreted (note: and widely reported in the regional media) as saying ASSK does not think sanctions are beneficial (see ref A). That resulted in the CEC's decision to release the correction which attributes to the SPDC regime and not to ASSK that "confrontation, utter devastation, economic sanctions and total block (sic) are not beneficial to the country and all people."

13. (C) We note that the NLD's current stance on sanctions, as on other issues, is not fully clear. CEC members are reluctant to make policy pronouncements unless they are coordinated with Aung San Suu Kyi, which is nearly impossible

due to her house arrest. From time to time the party has stated it did not call for sanctions, but that it has welcomed the decision of Western governments to impose them as a means of pressuring the regime. Accordingly, past NLD public statements have supported sanctions as a means of bringing democracy to Burma. In recent conversations with us, party members have not drawn any distinction between targeted visa/financial sanctions and broader economic sanctions.

¶4. (C) NLD CEC member Khin Maung Swe reported February 23 that the CEC is still discussing a possible adjustment to its approach on sanctions, a point he first raised in an NLD CEC meeting with us on February 10 when he proposed that the USG should engage with the regime, with sanctions on the table, whereas two other NLD CEC members in the same meeting argued for pressure and more pressure, at least until the regime releases all political prisoners (Ref B). Khin Maung Swe has now reconfirmed that he favors a nuanced NLD position in which a gradual reduction of sanctions is offered as a potential carrot in discussions with the regime. He gave the impression that he is still working internally to convince others of the utility of that approach. He was curious how the USG might view such an idea. A poloff at the UK Embassy told us Khin Maung Swe approached her to sound out the UK government's view as well.

Party Welcomes Ban's Visit but Will Not Invite Him

¶5. (C) CEC member Win Tin told us February 23 that the NLD issued its February 19 statement on a UNSYG visit to make clear that the release of political prisoners is a priority tangible result, not a precondition, for such a visit. Win

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Tin said the party cannot ask Ban Ki-Moon to come because "it is not our duty," and he said he personally thinks a Ban visit should not occur unless there are tangible results. Regarding whether or not Aung San Suu Kyi would meet with Ban should he visit, Win Tin and NLD spokesman Nyan Win speculated that she would likely agree unless the regime were to impose onerous conditions on the meeting.

Win Tin's Refusal to See Ojea Quintana

¶6. (C) Win Tin confirmed to us February 23 that he did, in fact, decline a meeting with UN Special Rapporteur Ojea Quintana. According to Win Tin, he was given little advance notice of the meeting and initially responded to Police Special Branch that if Ojea Quintana wanted a friendly, personal meeting he would be welcome at Win Tin's residence. He was told the meeting would be held at Sein Lay Kantha government guest house, and he consequently wrote Ojea Quintana a letter declining to meet. Win Tin said he did not feel a formal meeting would be appropriate, given that Ojea Quintana was not able to meet with other political parties and that Win Tin would not have the opportunity to consult with the rest of the NLD's CEC in advance. Thus, Win Tin would not be able to reflect the views of the party. Win Tin said he bears no hostility towards Ojea Quintana, and he hopes to see him on a future visit.

Comment: NLD Soul Searching

¶7. (C) The NLD's clarifications of its original statements on sanctions and a Ban visit could be nothing more than a fix of unclear language. However, it is also possible that the original statements reflected positions at the time which the NLD has later felt compelled to walk back. The initial statement on sanctions may have been deliberately ambiguous and intended as a trial balloon. Thereafter, we have heard the NLD received a letter from an exile group in the U.S. with a strong chastisement not to shift policy on sanctions.

Similarly, the NLD may have sensed a need to modify its position on a Ban visit particularly after Gambari portrayed the party as inflexible.

¶8. (C) In any case, there are clear signs a debate is under way within the CEC on big-picture issues, something that has not been visible in the recent past. The debate may well have been stimulated by Win Tin and Khin Maung Swe, who both were political prisoners until released last September. We continue to encourage the NLD to make its own calculations about what is in the best interest of the party and of Burma, stressing that the USG continues to support the cause of democracy, and making clear that we would welcome NLD ideas for the USG review of Burma policy that Secretary Clinton has announced.

DINGER